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Couple get from Dubai to Mexico in High Street cuisine dream

DUBAI to Banbury may not be a traditional house move, but one couple have excelled in bringing an international flavour to the town.

Rebecca Forbes and husband Tom Sowler opened Mexican-themed restaurant Lucha Burrito in High Street at the start of November, after packing in their jobs in the Gulf city to start a new life back home.

Despite neither owning a restaurant before, their cuisine has proved a big hit.

Mrs Forbes, 28, said: "We've tried to keep the meat quality high and all our ingredients are fresh and made upstairs."

The pair, who had worked in HR and finance, chose Mexican as it was a "growing trend" in the UK.

Mrs Forbes added: "The footfall has kept increasing, especially since we started using social media."



Rebecca and Tom opened the Mexican restaurant in November and say footfall has been good

Council leader aims to work with voluntary sector over cuts

FIGHT TO SAVE MOST AT RISK

Kieran Davey
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MORE must be done to protect Banbury's most vulnerable in the face of more of £51m of "brutal" cuts, a town councillor has argued.

Banbury Town Council leader Kieron Mallon has asked the county council to ensure vital services, including children centres and bus subsidies, are still available, even if they are part of the cut imposed next month.

The measures – branded by charities as "disastrous" – also include scrapping mobile libraries, reducing funding for the arts, homeless support, road gritting, elderly day services and support for carers.

There are also plans to replace 44 children's centres and seven early intervention hubs across the county – including four in Banbury – with eight centres.

Hundreds of people had taken to the streets, gone to public meetings and

taken part in a consultation on the proposals in the hope they could save services.

Mr Mallon said: "We are told a further £69m has to be found and, by law, the county has to set a balanced budget. I believe the council's reserves will be used to do this.

"As local councillors, we will be asking the county to help and work with the voluntary, charity and faith sector in north Oxfordshire to provide non-statutory services in a different way.

"The statutory duties to protect the most vulnerable are the priority and must continue, but they are also the most expensive."

Oxfordshire County Council leader Ian Hudspeth said the local authority was "desperately sorry" but that it had no alternative.

He also said the public should be under "no illusion" that there were more cuts to come.

'Brutal cuts' inevitable: Page 6
Children's services plea: Page 5

Kieron Mallon wants to work with charities and community groups to safeguard services for vulnerable people



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Dog found dead

CROPREDY: A family is upset over the death of their beloved dog, Fergie, who was found on the roadside after a social media campaign to find him.

Donna Ansell Thompson, who lives in Cropredy, lost the 15-month-old cockapoo on January 5, while out on a walk.

She pleaded with local people to help find Fergie in a Facebook post to Doglost Oxfordshire that was shared more than 5,000 times.

Dozens of followers banded together to search for him and his body was located on January 10.

Fire is smothered

BANBURY: A resident smothered a fire with a blanket in a house with no working smoke alarms.

Firefighters from Banbury, Bicester and Deddington were called to the blaze on Saturday at 12.15pm, after an electric heater caught light and melted a bedroom carpet.

Watch manager Mark O'Connor said it was "just luck" that a member of the family had gone upstairs and discovered the fire.

Savings on target

OXON: The county's hospitals are on track to make 89 per cent of their targeted cost savings by the start of April.

Oxford University Hospitals Foundation Trust heard it had made 80 to 85 per cent of the £46m it needs to save this year – the equivalent of £36 to £39m so far.

But bosses were told that by the end of the financial year the trust is expecting to have made £41m of efficiency savings.

Jag is 'best boss'

N OXON: A survey has chosen Jaguar Land Rover, which has its admin base near Banbury, as the best employer in the UK.

The Bloomberg Best Employers UK survey also put Oxford Bus Company in the UK top 10 in the transport and logistics category.

To identify the best employers, Statista conducted an online survey with 15,000 workers from more than 1,600 UK firms.

Employees at JLR in Gaydon, as well as all the other firms surveyed, were asked a series of questions about job satisfaction.

Building will start

OXON: Work on 85 new four- and five-bedroom homes in Bloxham is beginning this month.

Tracey Lee of Miller Homes Southern, builder of the Weavers Fields houses, said: "Bloxham showcases the best Oxfordshire has to offer."

Community champions receive much-needed cash from the Co-op's grant scheme



Groups pick up grants totalling £18,900 from Midcounties Co-operative director Steve Allsopp, centre, in Botley

TWELVE community groups from Oxfordshire have been handed a share of £18,900 from the Midcounties Co-operative.

Chipping Norton Lido and Chipping Norton & District Cricket Club were among the recipients of the grants.

Bicester-based Clean Slate will use its donation to fund a domestic abuse help programme for one year. The group provides coping skills to people who have been victim to physical and mental abuse.

Dry Sandford School PTA will be using the boost to purchase new outdoor play equipment and refurbish the outdoor play areas and Cruse Bereavement Care Oxfordshire's donation will go towards the costs of training courses for counsellors.

Other groups that were awarded grants include Yarnton Football Club, Old Marston Over 50s Club, Opera Unmasked and Wychwood Saplings.

1st Charlbury Scout Group, Yellow Submarine Holidays, Sajid Wyaid and Imran Shah Football Club also got grants.

Each group was presented with a donation of up to £2,000 at the Midcounties Co-operative Food store in Botley.

Now, other local groups are being urged to apply for the next round of the grants.

Apply at midcounties.coop.

Tory battles to save child centres and health units

Victoria Prentis claims that her 'rural idyll' constituency has areas of real deprivation

Naomi Herring
nherring@nqo.com

BANBURY'S MP has gone into battle in the House of Commons in an effort to defend children's centres and health units against budget cutbacks.

The MP spoke out for her constituency during a House of Commons debate on funding for rural and urban areas.

Victoria Prentis put forward her concerns for Banbury and Bicester in the light of a round of funding

cuts which she said would hit "areas of real deprivation".

In the debate last week, she told MPs: "I do not represent a rural idyll. I represent two large and growing towns – Banbury and Bicester."

"I feel particularly strongly about the fact that, because of the short-fall in local government funding, my council is having to make some very difficult funding decisions that will affect areas of real deprivation."

"They will affect children's centres and health and wellbeing centres and that is a worry."

Mrs Prentis raised the concerns during a debate on local government funding initiated by Conservative MP Graham Stuart.

It was put forward to highlight differences between rural areas and urban areas.

It comes as Oxfordshire County Council has to make savings of up to £70m over the next four years.

After the debate, Mrs Prentis added: "Local government funding is an extremely important issue for north Oxfordshire at the moment."

"It is important to see first-hand how valuable these places are to our communities."

"I was pleased to have the opportunity to raise this in the Commons, particularly given the obvious differences in rural and urban funding."

"I have more visits planned in north Oxfordshire, including to a health and wellbeing centre. I intend to continue discussions with colleagues in Westminster, too."

"It is absolutely vital that we do everything we can to protect front-line services."



Conservative MP Victoria Prentis

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Visit free fair for new job in the New Year

NEW starts for a new year are being offered by Banbury's businesses as they prepare for the town's first job fair of 2016.

Companies looking to fill their vacancies are being invited to advertise them free at the fair, which will take place at the town hall on February 23.

In previous years hundreds of job hunters have turned up to speak to company representatives about the careers on offer.

Cherwell District Council's lead member for estates and economy, Norman Bolster, said: "For lots of people, the new year signals a new start and one of



the top resolutions is to find a new job.

"Over the years, our job fairs have proved extremely popular with both jobseekers and employers, who are able to meet each other informally and learn more what the other has to offer."

"We are now looking to recruit local employers for the event, who have local vacancies to promote."

"This is a great opportunity for businesses to promote their jobs free to a target audience."

"As such, the job fair has proved extremely popular in the past, with stalls fully booked."

The fair is free for all jobseekers. People do not need to be unemployed to take part, but can be seeking a first job, looking for a return to work or just a career change.

The Banbury Job Fair is from 10.30am to 2pm on Tuesday, February 23. Call 01295 221863.

'Sad day' is fiction, says Mind chief

MENTAL HEALTH experts in Oxfordshire have labelled the concept of "Blue Monday" as damaging and trivialising to people suffering from depression.

The start of this week was dubbed "Blue Monday" because researchers have suggested that it rates as the most depressing day of the year.

Psychologist Dr Cliff Arnall identified the day in 2015 – calculated as the third Monday in January – by creating a formula which factored in the winter weather, levels of debt and the time that had passed since Christmas.

But mental health charity Oxfordshire Mind said it wanted to dispel the notion of Blue Monday as just a "myth."

Its chief executive, Patrick Taylor, said: "Blue Monday contributes to damaging misconceptions about depression and trivialises an illness that can be life-threatening.

"There is no credible evidence to suggest that one day in particular can increase the risk of people feeling depressed.

"There are, of course, certain things that may make people feel down at this time of year, such as post-Christmas financial strains, broken New Year's resolutions, bad weather and short daylight hours. However, depression is not just a one-day event."

He added: "We want to remind people in Oxfordshire that depression can happen at any time."

He said one in six people experienced depression during their lifetime.

Common symptoms include insomnia, seeing no point in the future, feeling disconnected and experiencing suicidal thoughts.

Mr Taylor urged anyone who had been affected by depression or anxiety to contact the free service TalkingSpace, which is run by Oxfordshire Mind alongside Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust.

The service can be contacted by telephone on 01865 901222 or by email at talkingspace@nhs.net.

Aid for refugees is donated by village

People stranded at Calais and Lesbos to get clothes and shelters from Hooky

Naomi Herring
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REFUGEES will get a hefty delivery of aid thanks to two friends who rallied round their village for donations.

The organisers of CalAid OX15 were inundated with support on Saturday at a collection for refugees in the Greek island of Lesbos.

Vanessa Porter, 44, set up the charity – which she has just renamed Hooky Refugee Action – with her friend Sami Newman last August.

The Hook Norton accounts manager said: "I saw a video of a little boy from Syria who had been ran over by a militia group. His mother wanted him to get to the UK for treatment. He was the same age as my son and I thought what I would do if that was me."

She and Mrs Newman, also from Hook Norton, took it upon themselves to collect for the thousands of families living in limbo at European refugee camps.

Mrs Porter said: "On Saturday we were trying to fill a container going to Lesbos, which is where a lot of refugees are. They need basic things like shoes and track-suit bottoms, because people get off the boat soaking without a change of clothes."

She was overwhelmed to collect enough to fill almost a third of the container, which is the size of six transit vans.

She said: "It was brilliant. People had even hand-knitted stuff, which just makes you cry. Our local primary schools donated



Vanessa Porter and Sami Newman with some of the donations to help refugees

food, and people gave us lots of bedding and blankets. We had a little cake sale which made £300, which we will save for the next emergency."

They also collected DIY products to build shelters in Calais, where Mrs Porter said refugees are suffering in the cold.

She said: "In the summer, people were in tents but they can't live like that in this kind of weather."

"One of the residents living in an area called The Swamp has a tent which is sopping wet, with rats in his bed. It's horrendous."

Mrs Porter was thankful for the support of villagers.

She said: "Somebody will give me their son's old coat and I know the person that will hand out that coat to somebody else's child. It's more personal than chucking it in a charity bin, that's why people respond well."

Church variety event

BANBURY: The annual church variety show is back for another year at St Mary's in Horsefair.

The show returns on Saturday, January 30, and brings together a host of local acts to entertain residents.

Tickets are £7.50 for adults and £5 for children and can be bought from the Tourist information centre or Castle Quay Shopping Centre.

It will run from 7pm; tickets will also be on the door subject to availability.

Competition display

BANBURY: Photography, sculptures and paintings from across north Oxfordshire will be shown at this year's Ironstone Art Prize 2016.

The competition and exhibition will be held at Banbury Museum in Spiceball Park Road from Saturday, January 23.

Artists from across the north of the county have put forward their work to be judged by a panel of five people and the overall winner will be awarded the Ironstone Art Prize.

It will run until March 12.

Comic tale of family

BANBURY: The Cross Players will perform *It Runs in the Family* at the Mill Arts Centre next month.

The comedy features a married doctor hiding a secret from his wife after finding out he has a son from a past relationship.

It runs from February 3 to 6. Tickets from the box office on 01295 279002.

Jewellery on show

BANBURY: Crafted jewellery will be on show at Rugrats and Halfpints in Beaumont Road.

The KNR fingerprint jewellery sale – at the indoor play centre on March 17, from 10am to noon – will include gifts to buy.

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Cloudy2Clear service the Oxford, Banbury & Abingdon areas and James is finding that his approach is a major factor

in his success. "The truth is that it's not just the personal satisfaction that I get from doing a good job but also it makes good business sense. I get a huge amount of business from friends and family of people I've done work for,

which just goes to show how much a little bit of effort is appreciated."

So, if your windows are steamed up, broken or damaged give James a call for a free quotation on 0800 61 21 118 and he'll be happy to help!



River revamp to finish this March

A RIVERSIDE makeover to transform the River Cherwell at Banbury's Spiceball Park is hoped to be completed by March this year.

Work is ongoing in the area to improve natural habitats for fish, birds and river plants in the park owned by Banbury Town Council.

It is part of a joint project run by the council and Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust.

Banbury Town Council's chairman of general services, Colin Clarke, said: "This is an exciting and innovative project

that will open up the River Cherwell in one of our most popular parks.

"Walking beside a river, watching birds and butterflies and listening to birdsong will be relaxing and enjoyable for everyone."

The first phase has seen the area cleared of vegetation and the trees overshadowing the river and creating shallow river banks. It is hoped this will encourage more river plants to grow and help clean the water.

Following the clearing, pollarding and coppicing of the

trees since last autumn, piles of wood have been left to create new habitats for beetles, newts and frogs over the winter. Other debris has been used to soften the river banks and create natural refuges for fish and river insects.

A £31,000 grant from the Environment Agency was awarded for the first phase and the town council is continuing into phase two and encouraging local volunteers to help.

Work on the site began in October and is hoped to be completed by March 2016.

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Appeal for snow wardens

Volunteers are needed to grit roads and pavements to protect the vulnerable

Naomi Herring
nherring@nqo.com

COMMUNITY snow wardens are being sought in Banbury as temperatures begin to drop and cold weather is expected to continue.

Volunteers for The Neighbourhood Snow Warden Scheme are wanted by Banbury Town Council.

The council scheme brings residents together to organise the gritting of the roads and pavements in the areas they live.

Leader of Banbury Town Council Kieron Mallon said: "Snow wardens are important and valued members of the community.

"They keep our roads, pavements and footpaths safer for everyone throughout the winter – particularly elderly and vulnerable residents who cannot help themselves.

"Wardens look after roads and footpaths in the town that are not on priority gritting routes, and help keep the town moving at times when snow and ice could restrict travel to and from work, schools and shops.

"It is an additional provision – not something that replaces any of our normal winter services.

"The scheme is a great way of getting communities working together during bad weather."



Last year, about 80 volunteers came forward to help their neighbours as temperatures dropped.

It is part of a partnership between the town council, Oxfordshire Coun-

ty Council and Cherwell District Council.

Mr Mallon added: "We can also work with businesses who want to do their bit by clearing snow from

around their places of work.

"The scheme is tried and tested and works well. It is a perfect example of councils working with the community for the common good."



Councillor Kieron Mallon, above right, says wardens would clear paths and grit pavements in their neighbourhoods; snowfall over the weekend in Chipping Norton and on the nearby Rollright Stones ancient monument, left and above

Warrant to arrest man

A JUDGE said it was "infuriating" a man accused of assault and having an offensive weapon had not completed his legal aid forms.

Judge Ian Pringle issued a warrant to arrest Barry Crowthers when the 28-year-old failed to attend a hearing at Oxford Crown Court on Monday.

Crowther, of Withycombe Drive, Banbury, denies possessing an offensive weapon in Greys Close, assaulting Donna Plant by beating her and causing criminal damage.

When he failed to attend court, his counsel, Claire Fraser, said the defence was not ready for trial because Crowther's legal aid had not been granted.

Judge Pringle said it was infuriating Crowther had not completed the forms and issued a warrant backed for bail.

Yob attack

A MAN was punched in the mouth while picking up a takeaway on Sunday.

The 41-year-old was parked in Middleton Road when a yob spat on the passenger window. The victim and his wife challenged the man who punched the husband – injuring his lip – before walking off.

Police said the attacker was white, in his thirties, 5ft 11in tall and of medium build. He had short hair and wore dark clothing and carried two white carrier bags.



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Plea to save services for families if centres close

Cuts to children's budget by county council could be a false economy – Labour

Kieran Davey
kdavey@nqo.com

UNIVERSAL family services must be available to people even if the county's children centres have to close, North Oxfordshire councillors have argued.

They have responded to county council proposals that all 44 of the county's centres and early intervention hubs should be closed, as part of plans to save £8m.

As part of the county-wide public consultation on the plans, Cherwell District Council officers produced a report which suggested councillors approve "Option 2" proposed by the county council.

This would mean eight centres would be retained for the most vulnerable families, although some universal services may still be provided.

In response to the report, Labour councillor Sean Woodcock called the proposals "short-sighted" and said closing the centres would mean more money would be lost



Protesters gathering in High Street, Banbury in December, including campaign co-ordinator Jill Huish, front right

than if they were saved.

He added: "This is going to be a false economy in the long run. This district should stand up for all the children's centres."

There are 10 children centres and two early intervention hubs in the district.

Conservative councillor Kieron Mallon said: "I am a realist, and I do not think all 44 children centres will be saved. There is not a one

size fits all solution to suit everyone."

The report also recommended that efforts should be made to maintain strong links between children's centres and schools.

Staff may strike to combat cuts

UNION members at Oxfordshire County Council could strike over proposed cuts to children's centres aimed at saving £8 million.

Unite has warned it will ballot staff who are members between this week and February 5.

The move is over the proposed closure of 44 children's centres across the county, as well as seven early intervention hubs, which the union says will put 420 "highly skilled" jobs at risk.

Unite says the children's centres are "vital support services for children, young people and their parents".

Regional officer Chris Gray said: "We are urging councillors to find an alternative solution to these damaging cuts and to vote against the proposals.

"The future of Oxfordshire's children's early intervention service is in their hands.

"They would do well to remember these cuts are the falsest of false economies.

"Our members protect children and young people from more costly interventions like social services, mental health services and prison."

The county council will vote on its latest budget proposals on February 16.

It wants to replace the centres with eight facilities for people aged up to 19 that will be run by a new service.

It is part of wider savings of more than £290 million the local authority has been forced to make since 2010 due to Government funding cuts.

Senior figures are also grappling with how they will find another £70 million of savings in time for next month's proposed budget.

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Council leader apologises for effects of cash crisis as organisations prepare for funding devastation

One-off cuts to plug £23m 'black hole'

TEMPORARY measures have been deployed to cover an estimated £23m black hole in county finances for the coming year, with bosses yet to find a permanent solution.

Oxfordshire County Council said in December it would have to find the extra cash, on top of the previously announced £51m, due to a change in the Government's funding formula.

After working through the Christmas holidays, finance chiefs this week said they could cover the immediate shortfall for 2016/17 with one-off cuts.

But they still need to find a permanent way of saving £11m of the overall figure from its annual budget.

The costs were covered this year using cash from reserves, changes to calculations of inflation and council tax income totalling £7.5m, and by making some cuts sooner than originally planned.

Mobile libraries are to be scrapped this year instead of in 2018, bringing an extra £122,000 saving, with staff cuts at trading standards to be brought forward to save £270,000.

Funds for staff training have been cut by £230,000 and £340,000 less is to be spent to buy library books.

But Nick Hards, a Labour county councillor, claimed that some of the changes represented "a gamble".

He raised concern about a new council estimate – in line with central government forecasts – that £3.6m more in council tax would be collected than previously thought.

'Brutal cuts' inevitable as county drafts budget



Ian Hudspeth, right, addressing parents who marched on County Hall last year to protest against proposed cuts; Labour group leader Liz Brighthouse, above; Paul Cann, the chief executive of Age UK, below



Matt Oliver
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CAMPAIGNERS had their worst fears confirmed as council leaders in Oxfordshire said they would have to push through more than £51m of "brutal" cuts, despite overwhelming opposition.

The measures – branded by charities as "disastrous" – include scrapping mobile libraries and bus subsidies, reducing funding for the arts, homeless support, road gritting, elderly day services and support for carers, and replacing 44 children's centres and seven early intervention hubs with eight centres.

Oxfordshire County Council leader Ian Hudspeth said the authority was "desperately sorry" but had no option.

He said there would be more cuts to come, with £11m of an estimated further £23m shortfall revealed still to be found in the long-term.

All services that were not statutory, he added, were now at risk.

The council avoided making the extra savings this year using one-off measures to "buy time", but taxpayers now face a 3.99 per cent rise in council tax – about £50 per year – to pay for rising costs in social care.

Mr Hudspeth said: "It is a more brutal budget than we thought and we are now facing a very challenging time."

"Our temporary measures mean we avoid cash flow problems, but they are a solution for one year only."

Jan Sunman, an Oxford Family Support Network campaigner, said: "There is a real sense of impotence. It's deeply saddening to see the cuts go ahead and the impact will be felt right across the community."

Campaign group Enough is Enough – a coalition of 16 organisations including Age UK, Citizens Advice and Alzheimer's Society – had "grave concerns".

Paul Cann, chief executive of Age UK Oxfordshire, said: "This is a disastrous blow to the interests of vulnerable people. What

we have to do now is retrieve what we can from the rubble."

He suggested district councils should use cash reserves to set up a "transition fund" to help reduce the impact.

Save Oxfordshire's Children's Centres campaign leader Jill Huish, of Banbury, said: "There are serious fears that all of these cuts together are going to push people into crisis."

County Labour group leader Liz Brighthouse said she was told of the decision to press ahead with £51.6m of cuts on Monday.

She said: "They are going to damage people's lives and we remain concerned about them."

David Williams, leader of the Green group, called for a bigger rise in council tax – which would require a referendum – and said parking charges should rise to reduce cuts.

He added: "We have to try and raise more money, because many of these savings are just false economies."

The cabinet will consider its budget on Tuesday. It will go to a full council vote on February 16.

Tax to rise to pay for police

PEOPLE in the Thames Valley will pay extra to the police force through council tax, to soften the blow from funding cuts.

Police and Crime Commissioner Anthony Stansfeld approved a two per cent rise in the force's tax precept at a police, planning and performance meeting on Monday.

Chief Constable Francis Habgood and Mr Stansfeld discussed and approved the budget with colleagues for the next financial year.

The 43,665 band D households in Oxford City will pay £3.26 more than last year, which brings the total bill per each house to £166.96 – a figure still below the national average of £172.17 per year.

The rise in the precept, which is part of council tax, was put forward to help balance the revenue budget for financial year.

The force is also proposing to recruit more special constables to take up roles in specified areas, such as fraud or cyber crime.

Mr Stansfeld said he was pleased with the budget for the next year after Chancellor George Osborne decided not to enforce 25 per cent cuts in his autumn statement.

He added: "We have been told by central Government to put the precept up and I thought it was the correct decision."

"We still have fairly large cuts to put in place this year, but I'm a lot happier than I thought I would be when we had forecast for even larger cuts."




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Madness, major UK chart stars during the 1980s, will be the opening night's headline act at Cropredy for 2016

New signs for M40 motorists

ROAD users will soon benefit from the latest technology on the M40, after work to upgrade message signs started on Monday.

The £1.7million project, which will take place at various locations between junctions 1A for the M25 and 10 at Ardley, will involve removing the old overhead message signs and replacing them with new models.

Highways England project manager Neil Doherty said: "This work will ensure better journeys for drivers as they will benefit from the latest technology to get up-to-date information about hazards or delays ahead."

"We have timed the work to minimise disruption but we are advising people to allow extra time for their journeys when closures are in place."

The first stage of work, to prepare the sites for the new signs, will be carried out in the roadside verges and should be completed by the end of January.

Only hard shoulders will be closed and drivers will not be affected during this part.

The next part of the project, to install and switch on the new signs, will start on January 25.

Cropredy for a bit of Madness

Popular 2 Tone band all set to headline Fairport Convention's festival

Tim Hughes
thughes@nqo.com

IT is going to be Madness at this year's Cropredy Festival. Quite literally.

The 2 Tone pop act, who made their name in the 1970s and 1980s, are among the headliners announced for this summer's Fairport's Cropredy Convention.

The *House of Fun* stars, fronted by Graham 'Suggs' McPherson, will headline the Thursday night. Friday's line-up will be topped by tribute act the Bootleg Beatles.

The Saturday will, as usual, be headlined by festival organisers

Fairport Convention.

The three-day event runs from August 11 to 13 and is expected to attract up to 20,000 festival-goers. They will be able to hear more than 30 hours of live music from 20 acts.

The latest announced acts will join a line-up already featuring *Streets of London* star Ralph McTell, folk-rockers Steeleye Span and hillbilly rockers Hayseed Dixie.

There will also be music from young folk duo Gilmore & Roberts, prog rockers Lifesigns, Gryphon and Headspace, Anthony John Clarke and Fairport's Dave Pegg, Sound of the Sirens, Wille and the Bandits, Richard Digance, Pierce Brothers, Demon Barbers XL and Babylon Circus.

One-day, two-day and three-day tickets are available from fairportconvention.com or by calling 01295 404044.



Ralph McTell, above, pictured on the Cropredy stage in 2009; Friday night's headliners, the Bootleg Beatles, below



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New head with exciting plans for school's future

Appointment of teacher who worked in Kenya with underprivileged children

Kieran Davey
kdavey@nqo.com

A TEACHER who looks after underprivileged children in Kenya will become the new headteacher of Sibford School in September.

Toby Spence will take over from Michael Goodwin, who is retiring after being head at the school for 12 years.

Mr Spence, who was born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, will become only the twelfth head in the school's 174-year history. He is currently head of an international day and boarding school in Kenya, for children aged two to 18.

He said: "I'm greatly looking forward to moving back to the UK and taking over as head of Sibford School."

Mr Spence, who has three children with his wife Jill, studied history and physical education at Sheffield University before spending five years as head of history at Bootham School in York.

In 2007, he was appointed director of learning in Yarm School



Toby Spence, the newly-appointed head of Sibford School, with Michael Goodwin

in Stockton-on-Tees. He moved to Kenya three years ago.

School committee chairman Seren Wildwood said: "We had a very strong field of candidates for this post but believe that Toby

is the perfect person to take over the headship here at Sibford. He has some exciting plans for the future."

Mr Goodwin said: "I see in Toby Spence the kind of personal quali-

ties and values that will fit so well with Sibford School's ethos. He clearly has the right kind of educational and leadership experience. I am delighted that he has accepted the post."

Recruits plea at ambulances day

PEOPLE were able to get a glimpse of how paramedics operate on a daily basis at a South Central Ambulance Service recruitment day.

Staff gave information about their jobs to encourage people to sign up for a number of roles, including drivers, emergency response staff and call centre workers.

Organisers said the event, in Bicester, had been a success after more than 200 people attended.

Paul Antony, of Botley, said: "I went along because I was just curious how everything worked. 'I has never been inside an ambulance before so that was new for me. It was quite interesting to see how they all work and what they do on a day-to-day basis.'"



Education manager Max Suhdeo talks to Paul Antony

Healthwatch meeting

GP patients can question Oxfordshire's health watchdog about its plans to become a charity at a public meeting.

The board of Healthwatch Oxfordshire will meet at Abingdon's Long Furlong Community Centre on January 26, from 4pm. Patients can submit questions up to five working days before the meeting.

The board is seeking charitable status to secure more funding amid local government cuts. An agenda and contact details for questions can be found at healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk.

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André Rieu in Maastricht

Live in concert on the Vrijthof Square
3 days from £269.00, 8 & 15 July 2016

See André Rieu in his hometown of Maastricht in the Netherlands. Don't miss the 'Waltz King' and his wonderful Johann Strauss Orchestra, Choir, Soloists and Special Guests in a magical musical experience you will never forget. During the concert on the Vrijthof Square you'll see André play music from across his repertoire, including his latest release, 'Roman Holiday'.

Highlights & inclusions

- A seated ticket to see André Rieu & The Johann Strauss Orchestra live in concert on the Vrijthof Square in Maastricht (ticket upgrades available)
- A visit to Maastricht
- Two nights' three-star standard bed and continental breakfast hotel accommodation
- Coach travel from the local area and Channel crossings
- Escorted by a friendly tour manager

Spanish Riding School of Vienna

At the Barclaycard Arena, Birmingham
2 days from £139.00, 19 November 2016

The famous White Lipizzener stallions and riders of the Spanish Riding School of Vienna are heading back to Britain in 2016 and you could be there to experience this extraordinary and unforgettable spectacle.

Highlights & inclusions

- A ticket for The Spanish Riding School of Vienna at the Barclaycard Arena, Birmingham (upgrades available)
- Visit to Stratford-upon-Avon
- One night's bed and English breakfast accommodation at a good hotel in the Midlands area
- Coach travel from the local area
- Escorted by a friendly tour manager

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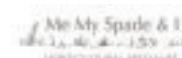
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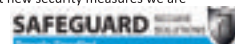
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Full of variety and interest!

4 days from £219.00, 22 Apr, 24 Jun & 23 Sept 2016

Explore the amazing Italianate village of Portmeirion and enjoy two memorable railway journeys, which take you 'coast to coast' from Llandudno through Snowdonia to Porthmadog, including a ride on the famous Ffestiniog Railway. There's also the chance to journey on the recently restored Welsh Highland Railway. This all adds up to a memorable break, based in the popular coastal resort of Rhyl.

Highlights & inclusions

- Visit to Llandudno
- Single journeys on the Conway Valley Railway and Ffestiniog Railway
- Visit to Portmeirion
- Three nights' half-board accommodation at the Westminster Hotel in Rhyl
- Coach travel from the local area
- Escorted by a friendly tour manager

*Book by 20 February 2016. Please quote code 346009. £10 reduction is off the price shown above. Offer may be withdrawn at any time.

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20 February 2016



Lindisfarne & the Alnwick Garden

Explore the beautiful kingdom of Northumbria!

4 days from £259.00, 27 May & 29 July 2016

Visit the magical Alnwick Garden, one of the most talked about and remarkable garden transformations of recent times, and Holy Island, or Lindisfarne, cradle of English Christianity, on this wonderful weekend. You'll also enjoy a tour of Northumbria's beautiful heritage coastline.

Highlights & inclusions

- Entrance to The Alnwick Garden
- Tour of Northumbria's heritage coastline and visit to Lindisfarne
- Visit to York
- Three nights' dinner, bed and English breakfast accommodation at the three-star Holiday Inn in Washington (or similar)
- Coach travel from the local area
- Escorted by a friendly tour manager

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Cream of the Cotswolds

A great-value midweek break
5 days from £259.00, 18 Apr & 10 Oct 2016

Discover and explore the scenic 'Heart of England'.

Highlights & inclusions

- Visits to Moreton-in-Marsh and ancient Stow-on-the-Wold
- A visit to Bourton-on-the-Water - a Cotswold favourite
- Leisure time in historic Warwick
- Visits to Banbury and Shakespeare's Stratford-upon-Avon
- Journey through the Vale of Evesham to visit Broadway
- Four nights' dinner, bed and breakfast accommodation at the Royal Court Hotel in Coventry
- Coach travel from the local area
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Beamish, Whitby & the North York Moors Railway

Nostalgia and scenic beauty

4 days from £285.00, 22 April & 14 October 2016

Explore Beamish, 'The Living Museum of the North', a wonderful re-creation of North-East life in 1825 and 1913, enjoy some sea air in Whitby, and journey through some stunning scenery on the steam-hauled North Yorks Moor Railway.

Highlights & inclusions

- Visit to Harrogate
- A ride on the North York Moors Railway from Pickering to Grosmont
- Visit to Whitby
- Entrance to Beamish
- Visit to the Richmond
- Three nights' dinner, bed and English breakfast accommodation at the St George's Hotel in Darlington (or similar)
- Coach travel from the local area
- Escorted by a friendly tour manager

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Autumn Gold in the Lakes

A feast to autumnal colours!
3 days from £189.00, 7 October 2016

This is your chance to explore Chester and enjoy the awesome beauty of the Lakes.

Highlights & inclusions

- Tour of the Peak District
- Lake District visit and a trip on the Lakeside & Haverthwaite Railway and a cruise on Lake Windermere
- A visit to Chester
- Two nights' dinner, bed and English breakfast accommodation at a good hotel
- Coach travel from the local area
- Escorted by a friendly tour manager

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Oxfordshire Listings

Events

THURSDAY

Tokens of Love: The Oxfordshire Museum, Park Street, Woodstock. This exhibition traces the history of the Valentine from early 19th century onwards. It features objects used as love tokens, including bobbins and corset stays to rings and photographs, via smocks and samplers and a stunning collection of Valentine cards from Shell, which began sending Valentine greetings cards to their female drivers in 1938. Until March 13. Free admission. 01993 811456.

Robert Strange: Cornerstone Arts Centre, 25 Station Road, Didcot. The Harwell artist is staging an exhibition of everyday items that we regularly use and throw-away. From from dice to plastic cracker toys, along with detailed drawings, paintings, prints and photographs. Open Tuesday-Saturday 10am-6pm, Sunday 11am-4pm, closed Monday. Until February 21. Free admission. 01235 515144.

FRIDAY

Game show challenge: Westcott Sports and Social Club, Ashendon Road, Westcott. 7pm. £10 per person, including a buffet. Form a team or join another – maximum of 10 per team. Book a table by calling Donna 01296 651855. Profits will go to the Umbrella Fund.

SATURDAY

Quiz night: The Pine Lodge, Thame Road, Little Milton. Come on your own or in a team. Licensed bar – corkage £2 per bottle. 7pm. Tickets at £8, including a two-course dinner, are on sale at LM Post Office.

Table-top sale: Island Farm Donkey Sanctuary, Old Didcot Road, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell. Indoor table-top and jumble sale at Island Farm Donkey Sanctuary, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell. Varied stalls, good parking and refreshments. 11am. 50p. Setting up for sellers from 10am. Pitches available from £6 (tables supplied) – call 01491 833938.

Circular walk: Meet at Begbroke Village Hall, ref. SP470140 at 10.30am for a leisurely five-mile walk. Registered assistance dogs only. Organised by Jan Lacey of Bicester and Kidlington Ramblers on 07920 842699. The group's AGM is at the Royal Sun at 3pm.

Burmese Cat Association Show: Ardley with Fewcott Village Hall, Ardley. The association is having its first championship show. There will be a range of classes for pedigree Burmese cats and kittens of all colours as well as non-pedigree pet classes. Teas, coffees, cakes and other refreshments will be available. There will be a raffle in aid of cat welfare. 1pm. Adults £2.50, concessions £1, family ticket £5. 01827 715591.

Indoor car boot sale: Dunmore Primary School, Northcourt Road, Abingdon. Refreshments available. 10.30am-12.30pm Entry £1, children free. If you are interested in selling, you can hire a table for £5 – contact Stacey at friendsofdunmore@hotmail.com

Volunteer open day: Cogges Manor Farm, Church Lane, Witney. Drop-in event for anyone thinking of volunteering at the farm. Meet the gardening team, take a house tour and find out about plans for the development of Cogges. Available roles include administration, marketing, stewarding, gardening, animal care, tour

guides. 10am-3pm. 01993 772602.

Jumble sale: Village hall, Fewcott Road, Fritwell. Cakes, bric-a-brac, books, toys, teas and good-as-new clothes are being sold in aid of St John Ambulance. Free. 07725 783112.

TUESDAY

Kidlington and District Historical Society: St John's Ambulance Hall, High Street, Kidlington. Villager John Lowe, who has researched the backgrounds of all the men whose names appear on the Kidlington War Memorial, will give a talk entitled *Where Are the Boys of the Village Tonight?*, which coincides with the release of his book on the subject. 7.50pm. Visitors £3.50, under 26s 50p. 01865 375758.

Circular walk: A leisurely 3.5-mile walk via Aynho, meeting near The Fox pub, Souldern, ref. SP521315, at 10am. Organised by Mary Gough, of Bicester and Kidlington Ramblers. 07939 826412.

Ramblers' walk: Meet at the village hall car park, Stanton St John at 10am. Five-mile walk to Beckley and Sydlings Copse, with pub stop at end. The walk is not suitable for dogs. Organised by Thame and Wheatley group of the Ramblers' Association. 01865 358905.

WEDNESDAY

Charity quiz night: The Oxfordshire Yeoman pub, 172 Wroslyn Road, Freeland. In aid of Marie Curie Cancer Care. You can come as a team or be put into one on the night. Bar snacks are available. Raffle prizes on the night would be appreciated. 7.30pm for 8pm. Entry £3. For more information, contact Nicky Clargo on oxfordshire.stars@gmail.com

Alice in Waterland: Museum of Oxford, St. Aldates, Oxford. Talk by local author Mark Davies to coincide with the date of Lewis Carroll's birthday in 1832, about the inspirational people, places, and events on or by the river. 6pm. Free. 01865 252334.

Wildlife on your doorstep: Large village hall, Hunters Field, Stanford in the Vale. Talk by keen photographer May Parker, author of book *Just Before the Dawn*. There will be a raffle, plus tea and coffee. 7.30pm. £3 for non members. Free parking. 01367 710445.

Comedy

THURSDAY

Josh Widdicombe: Oxford Playhouse, Beaumont Street, Oxford. Widdicombe has a BBC3 sitcom, *Josh*, and is a regular panellist on television comedy shows such as Channel 4's *The Last Leg* and presenter of BBC Radio 5 Live's Saturday morning sport show *Fighting Talk*. He is on tour with his new stand-up show *What Do I Do Now?* His show on Friday is sold out. 7.30pm. Tickets £17.50, concessions £15.50 from oxfordplayhouse.com

FRIDAY

Ian Stone: The Northcourt (Abingdon Utd FC), Northcourt Road, Abingdon. Ian Stone is considered one of the most talented topical acts in the country and is provocative but with an easy-going manner. He has had many TV appearances, including *Mock the Week* on BBC2 and is presenter of BT Sport show *The Football's On*. Also appearing on the night will be James Redmond and John Lynn. 7.30pm. £12. 01235 856076.

The Noise Next Door: The Mill Arts



Centre, Banbury. The improvisation comedy group is on its third national tour, taking audience suggestions and transform them into funny scenes and songs in the blink of an eye. There will be ludicrous characters, witty one-liners, epic stories, and explosive physicality. Last year, the group had an eighth consecutive sell-out run at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and a series of television appearances. 8pm. £19. 01295 279002.

SATURDAY

The Noise Next Door: Cornerstone Arts Centre, 25 Station Road, Didcot. 8pm. £14.50, concessions £13. 01235 515144. See above for details of the act.

Hal Cruttenden: The Theatre, Chipping Norton. The host of Live at the Apollo and star of Radio 4, is back on the road, ranting about the real evils of the modern world, such as over-sharing on social media and the 5:2 diet. 7.45pm. £16. 01608 642350.

Music

FRIDAY

Female folk artists: Cornerstone Arts Centre, 25 Station Road, Didcot. Ten top female folk musicians will perform on the night, including Eliza Carthy, Karine Polwart, the Lady Maisery trio, Hazel Aske, Rowan Rheingans and international fiddler Hannah Read. *Songs of Separation* will feature music spanning the traditions of England and Scotland. 8pm. Adults £20, concessions £18. 01235 515144.

Bon Jovi tribute: The Theatre, Chipping Norton. Bon Jovi will perform the band's hits including *Livin' on a Prayer*, *It's My Life* and *Wanted Dead or Alive*. 7.45pm. £16.50. 01608 642350.

Pete McCray: The Angel, Market Square, Witney. The best in soul and reggae music. 9pm. Free entry. 01993 703238.

SATURDAY

Yes tribute: Players Theatre, Nelson Street, Thame. The tribute act Yes Please will perform the music of the successful 1970s prog rock band, whose hits include *Wonderous Stories* and *Owner of a Lonely Heart*. 7.45pm. £10. 01296 747017.

The Summits: Lampet Arms, Tadmorton, near Banbury. Male duo perform a mixture of covers from 1960s to the present day. 9pm. Free entry. 01295 780070.

Paul Downes: The Swan Inn, Shipton Road, Ascott-under-Wychwood. The folk singer, considered one of the top acoustic guitarists in the world, has worked with Phil Beer and Pete Seeger, along. He has featured on several albums

Monty Kimball-Evans (Vileun the Vile) and Jon Crowley (Santa) are in the cast of *Santa in Space*, which continues at the Unicorn Theatre, Abingdon, on Thursday, Friday and Saturday

traditional pantomime about how a handsome prince rescues his beloved from her lofty prison cell by climbing up her long hair to reach her. But the path of true love never runs smooth and he must overcome prickly obstacles to achieve his goal. On the way, there will be a range of colourful characters including witches, a dancing robin, silly gnomes, ghosts, courtiers and pretty fairies. Performances run until January 30 (no shows on Sundays or Mondays) with Saturday matinée at 2.30. Adults £12, concessions £10, children £6. Tickets from cornexchange.org.uk or 01491 825000.

Santa in Space: Unicorn Theatre, Checker Walk, Abingdon. The biennial Abingdon Drama Club pantomime sees the evil Vileun the Vile kidnap Santa Claus in his bid to rule the universe. Performances on Thursday and Friday at 7.30pm and Saturday at 2.30pm and 7.30pm. Tickets at £10, concessions £8, from The Bookstore, 15 Bury Street, Abingdon.

Cash on Delivery: Village hall, Cote Road, Aston. ACTS (Aston and Cote Thespian Society) will perform Michael Cooney's riotous farce, set in an East London living room, in which Ms Jenkins the DSS inspector calls on Eric Swan, who has pocketed thousands of pounds through fraudulent benefit claims. Suitable for children over 10 years. There will be refreshments and a raffle. Performances will be on Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 7.30pm. Tickets £7/£8 from Aston Stores.

FRIDAY

Knight Fever: Village centre, Kennington Road, Kennington. Kennington Amateur Dramatic Society is staging a pantomime set in medieval times, with knights, a dragon, and lots of audience participation. In the story, Camelot is under threat from the evil Black Knight and all seems lost when King Arthur, his knights and the Merlin are unable to avert disaster – until Justin, the brave and humble stable boy steps into the breach with only the help of a court jester and a doty dame. In support of Help for Heroes. Refreshments available. Performances are on Friday at 8pm, Saturday at 2pm and 7.30pm, Sunday at 2pm, and on Friday and Saturday next week. Tickets are adults £8.50, concessions £6.50 and £25 for a family of four from 01865 739025.

TUESDAY

CADS auditions: Upstairs room, Methodist hall, Fishers Lane, Charlbury. Charlbury Amateur Dramatics Society (CADS) will be having open auditions for its May production *Dancing at Lughnasa* on Tuesday and Thursday at 7.45pm. This multi-award winning play – which was made into a film starring Meryl Streep – is about five impoverished spinster sisters in a remote part of Ireland in 1936. There are parts for five women, with ages ranging from late 20s to early 50s, and three young men. An ability to speak with a soft southern Irish accent is desirable. Help is also needed backstage. For information, contact CADS chairman Tim Widdows at Cotswold Frames on 01608 811805.

– either with bands or as a solo performer, plus tours extensively in the USA and Europe. 8pm. Tickets are £8 in advance from 01993 831427 or wegottickets.com/wychwoodfolkclub, £10 on the door. 01993 831427.

Ska and reggae night: Played by local DJs at the Horse and Jockey pub, West Bar Street, Banbury. 8pm. Free entry.

Music night: Royal British Legion, Spring Road, Abingdon. The Prisoners of Katrina will be appearing at the club, following their slot at the Party in the Parks event in Abingdon last summer. Drinks on sale and a raffle. 8.30pm. Free. 01235 554418.

Roy Orbison tribute: New Theatre, Oxford. Barry Steele and friends celebrate the 'Big O's' legacy, playing his songs from the early years through to the late 1980s and his time with The Traveling Wilburys. 7.30pm. Tickets £21-£27 from atgtickets.com/oxford

SUNDAY

The Great Western Tears: Cafe Bar, Cornerstone Arts Centre, 25 Station Road, Didcot. The Oxford country band play gritty, authentic Roots music. 8pm. Pay what you like. 01235 515144.

George Haslam: The Nag's Head, The Bridge, Abingdon. It will also feature Robin Jones on drums, Steve Kershaw on bass and Russian guests Leonid and Nick Vintskovich. 5pm. Free admission. 01235 529012.

Film

THURSDAY

Pepe le Moko (PG): Abingdon Health and Wellbeing Centre, Audlett Drive, Abingdon. In this early French film noir, a wanted thief, on the run from the authorities, takes refuge in the Kasbah of Algiers. Inspector Slimane, knowing his prey's Achilles heel is his desire to return to his beloved Paris, sets up a honey trap with the beautiful Gaby. Screening organised by the Abingdon College and District Film Society. 7.45pm. £6. 01235 521976.

Theatre

THURSDAY

Rapunzel: Corn Exchange, Market Place, Wallingford. Theatre-goers of all ages are set to be captivated by this

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Inspiring satire of financial crisis does not fall short

THE BIG SHORT (15, 130 mins) A comedy/drama with Christian Bale, Steve Carell, Ryan Gosling, Brad Pitt, Rafe Spall, Marisa Tomei and Melissa Leo. Director: Adam McKay

A FOOL and his hard-earned money are soon parted and in 2008, many of us turned out to be unwitting fools when the mortgage crisis in America catalysed the collapse of financial institutions, resulting in an ice age of global austerity that has yet to thaw.

Bankers were demonised, political establishment passed bucks as if they were handling red-hot potatoes and hard-working families paid an eye-watering price.

The Wall Street meltdown doesn't sound like ripe fruit for a cocktail of potty-mouthed hilarity and heartbreaking drama, but Adam McKay, director of the *Anchorman* films, begs to differ.

McKay draws inspiration from Michael Lewis's non-fiction account of the housing and credit bubble to dramatise the incredible true story of the men who made a killing by wagering against the US economy.

"While the whole world was having a big ol' party, a few outsiders and weirdos saw what no one else could," explains sharp-suited narrator, Jared Vennett (Ryan Gosling), a bond salesman with a nose for profits.

He is our wise-cracking guide to this high-pressure world of bulls, bears and multi-million dollar trades.

However, Jared is not the first person to spot impending doom.

That honour goes to quixotic hedge fund manager Michael Burry (Christian Bale).

The Big Short is a blisteringly

funny and provocative portrait of irresponsibility, fraud and gaudy excess, brought vividly to life by a superb ensemble cast.

Carell and Bale shine brightest in the glittering firmament, imbuing their socially awkward oddballs with vulnerability, guilt and regret.

OUR BRAND IS CRISIS (15, 107 mins) A comedy/drama starring Sandra Bullock, Billy Bob Thornton and Joaquim de Almeida. Director: David Gordon Green

COLD, unvarnished truth rarely darkens the doorstep of modern politics.

Instead, slick sound bites, unsustainable promises, smear campaigns and scare tactics are employed to herd an apathetic electorate, which gets more excited about the winner of a reality TV contest than the shifting sands of Westminster.

Our Brand Is Crisis is a sharp satire, inspired by Rachel

Boynton's 2005 documentary about the impact of American campaign strategists on the outcome of the 2002 Bolivian presidential election.

David Gordon Green's film retains the South American setting, but blurs the line between art and life with fictional characters on both sides of the social and political divide.

Scriptwriter Peter Straughan arms his morally corrupt characters with polished one-liners to justify their tactics.

Sandra Bullock and Billy Bob Thornton are a delicious double, playing rival spin doctors who will stop at nothing to undermine each other's candidates. Pedro Castillo (Joaquim de Almeida), the unpopular president of Bolivia,



A strong ensemble cast for *The Big Short* includes Jeremy Strong as Vinnie Daniel, Rafe Spall as Danny Moses, Hamish Linklater as Porter Collins, Steve Carell as Mark Baum, Jeffrey Griffin as Chris and Ryan Gosling as Jared Vennett

is languishing in fifth place in the polls.

He needs Jane's expertise to turn the political tide away from frontrunner Rivera (Louis Arcella), whose campaign is masterminded by her arch-nemesis, Pat Candy (Thornton).

Jane contends with altitude sickness and her barely concealed contempt for Castillo to formulate the perfect plan of attack: convince the people that Bolivia, their country is on the precipice of disaster.

The film hinges on Bullock and she displays impeccable comic timing, whether it's physical pratfalls or tossing verbal grenades. However, the film loses its way in the final act.

Cake Bookworm

Shame And Wonder by David Searcy, hardback by William Heinemann, £16.99 (ebook £9.99)

TEXAN writer David Searcy is far from a household name; as yet, he doesn't even have a Wikipedia page. But that should soon change if these essays and meditations find the audience they deserve.

He covers subjects ranging from coyotes, Google Maps and dental hygiene, to Santa's old diocese and the toys that used to come in breakfast cereal. But really, this is the spectacle of a mind considering its world and itself; using the everyday, the specific and the peculiar to poke at universal questions of time, love, loss and perception.

As the title suggests, *Shame And Wonder* is a bittersweet book, but also a sharp and profoundly wise one. Wherever Searcy starts, he often circles back to a particular set of preoccupations: wide open spaces (Texan or astronomical),

old graffiti, absent friends. Fans of nature writing, Americana and the philosophical will find much to soothe, divert and provoke.

Beside Myself by Ann Morgan, hardback by Bloomsbury, £12.99 (ebook £6.02)

THE subject of twins and their relationship seems to be a popular one in fiction and this debut thriller follows the story of sisters Ellie and Helen, who swap places aged six. At first, it is a game, but Ellie – the more submissive twin who has lived in her sister's shadow – refuses to swap back and Helen is forced into a new identity. Helen goes on to develop a range of behavioural problems. While Ellie flourishes, she spirals into a self-destructive path of mental illness and addiction. This is an accomplished tale, with an excellent plot and a brilliant, multi-layered narrative voice. At times, however, it felt a bit too like a misery memoir. But there is no

doubt this is a taut and compulsive read.

The Red Abbey Chronicles: Maresi by Maria Turttschaninoff, hardback by Pushkin, £10.99 (ebook £6.47)

BLOOD, power, sisterhood and fear entwine in this young adult tale, where women are second-class citizens, denied education and owned by their fathers. But there is a safe haven for girls: the Red Abbey, an ancient sanctuary on a rocky island that promises community, freedom, protection. They just have to get there. This terrifying, topsy-turvy world comes into focus thanks to the thoughtful narration of the title character, book-lover Maresi, who tells us everything was fine until new girl Jai arrived, her past hunting her down. Finnish fantasy author Turttschaninoff's tale unfurls slowly, drip-feeding secrets of the island and snippets about inhabitants.

Travel

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Banbury United's Ricky Johnson (left), who scored four goals, is congratulated by Leam Howards
Picture: Lucy Ford

Johnson stars in United win

Puritans cruise on day of celebrations for club

RICKY Johnson bagged a four-timer as Banbury United moved back into the play-off places with a commanding 5-0 win over Larkhall Athletic. It turned out to be a day of celebrations as the Puritans welcomed former players to mark 50 years since the club changed its name from Banbury Spencer.

A Neil Arndale own goal put the hosts ahead in the second minute of the Evo-Stik Southern League Division 1 South & West fixture.

Johnson then doubled

their advantage from the penalty spot and added another from six yards.

He then headed home to complete his hat-trick before the break.

Banbury controlled proceedings and Johnson converted from close range to make it 5-0 on 86 minutes.

United's Oxfordshire Senior Cup tie at Oxford City on Tuesday night was postponed due to their opponents' involvement in the FA Trophy.

They visit rock bottom Bashley this Saturday.

Banbury United: Harding, White, Welch-Hayes, Stanbridge, Westbrook, Gunn, Bell (Barcelos 48), Nash, Johnson, Howards (Steedman 78), McEachran (Browne HT).

Subs not used: Martin, Wise.

Attendance: 359

EVO-STIK SOUTHERN LEAGUE										
Division 1 South & West										
	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts			
Cinderford Tn	23	17	4	2	48	14	55			
Taunton Tn	25	16	6	3	50	20	54			
Winchester City	24	15	4	5	60	33	49			
Swindon Sup	24	15	4	5	45	24	49			
Banbury Utd	25	13	9	3	61	26	48			
North Leigh	25	15	3	7	54	23	48			
Tiverton Tn	26	13	9	4	45	29	48			
Evesham Utd	25	12	7	6	46	25	43			
Shortwood Utd	23	13	1	9	46	40	40			
Didcot Tn	25	11	4	10	50	43	37			
Bishops Cleeve	21	9	7	5	33	34	34			
AFC Totton	27	10	3	14	52	55	33			
Yate Tn	26	8	10	33	33	32				
Larkhall Ath	26	8	7	11	42	44	31			
Marlow	24	8	4	12	40	44	28			
Mangotsfield Utd	25	7	6	12	37	48	27			
Slimbridge	24	6	7	11	25	33	25			
Bridgwater Tn	25	7	4	14	28	50	25			
Wimborne Tn	26	7	3	16	48	60	24			
Wantage Tn	26	5	2	19	32	64	17			
Burnham	26	4	18	28	59	16				
Bashley	23	0	0	23	9	111	0			

Brilliant Bulls bag 11 tries to inch clear

JOE Mills, Josh Deegan, Sam Stoop and Matt Goode starred as Banbury scored 11 tries against 14-man Bedworth in a crushing 71-7 victory.

Deegan opened the scoring in the Midlands 2 West (South) clash, with Ed Phillips converting for a 7-0 lead.

Stoop and Goode then got in on the act, Phillips adding the extras, to make it 21-0.

Banbury had the taste for points as Stoop crossed again and Phillips made no mistake.

After a Bedworth prop was sent off, Phillips converted his try.

But they conceded to go into the break with a 35-7 lead.

The hosts were too strong, with Jed Boyle going over, before Mills added a further two tries. Phillips converted twice to make it 54-7.

There was still time for Jimmy Manley, Goode and Deegan to cross.

Phillips converted one as Bulls eased home, extending their lead to four points.

STARS with Claire Petulengro

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ARIES

Mar 21-Apr 19

A more artistic side to your personality evolves which opens up many new avenues for you on both a personal and professional level. Time spent with faces from your past helps you tie up a lot of loose ends. You find it possible to move on as was never previously possible. Financial opportunity comes from contacts you made since the New Year. Ring now for the full story.

0906 585 4360

TAURUS

Apr 20-May 20

If you are truly loved, then you will be given the freedom of choice you want. That is why this week you question who should be in your life and who you need to distance yourself from. A more intense personal life means it's decision time, but ensure it's you who decides and not just friends or family. Ring now to hear how Uranus gives you the freedom to change jobs should you desire.

0906 585 4361

GEMINI

May 21-Jun 20

Travel links are strong and you find yourself more confident to explore new places and to talk to strangers. You're more at peace with who you are, and rightly so. An exchange of words which occurred last week needs to be tied up before Friday. Show you can be the bigger person please Gemini. Ring now to hear why it's worth saying yes to impromptu invitations this January.

0906 585 4362

CANCER

Jun 21-Jul 22

It's time to do your sums and to work out what you can and can't afford to spend as February will be offering you the chance to try out all sorts of new things and it's important that you know what and who should be your priority. Your love sector promises you a memorable and very dramatic week, as you'll soon discover for yourself. Ring now to hear who you mustn't argue with.

0906 585 4363

LEO

Jul 23-Aug 22

Many of you Leo's could well be responsible for quite a few broken hearts by the end of this month. You may not realise it, but you have wooed and dazzled some of the most stubborn signs in the zodiac with your charm. A more solo career path beckons which should allow you the freedom I feel you have been seeking. Ring now to hear why this is a great time for selling and buying.

0906 585 4364

VIRGO

Aug 23-Sep 22

Keep clear of those you know make you feel bad or negative about yourself. You are a sign with so much to give and I think you should be proud of how far you've come since this time last year. A financial agreement is soon to be put in place which makes your life a much easier place to be. Mixed words make for an emotional weekend. Ring now for clarity and clear vision in life.

LIBRA

Sep 23-Oct 22

You think you need more than you do, when actually you are a sign who wants and deserves a simple life of commitment and security. Your ruling planet Venus tries to make you think otherwise this week, so be careful of asking for more than you really want please my friend. Can friends be lovers? You find out by Friday. Ring now so I can tell you why January is so fantastic.

0906 585 4366

SCORPIO

Oct 23-Nov 21

There are many dreams you have for the future and the wonderful thing about your sign is that many of them are for your close ones, not just for yourself. This week, you get to see them come true both for yourself and for your loved ones and so you're left feeling content and aware of how exciting life can be when you work hard. Ring now to hear what 2016 promises to be for you.

0906 585 4367

SAGITTARIUS

Nov 22-Dec 21

Those who have usually been a good influence now seem to be the very ones who are leading you astray. Set your own standards and don't allow yourself to undo all of the good work that this year has already seen you do. You'll only be angry at yourself come next week if you do my friend. Bad habits can and should be broken on Monday. You can do this! Ring now for support and foresight.

0906 585 4368

CAPRICORN

Dec 22-Jan 19

I know you're feeling sad about something which didn't work out, but trust me when I say that those involved have actually done you a favour. A better relationship with family evolves from Tuesday and you start to get a better understanding of who you are and what you really need from life and love. Ring now to hear why it's better to ignore the dramas of an ex.

0906 585 4369

AQUARIUS

Jan 20-Feb 18

Those who are having a difficult time in life will be turning to you for advice and guidance, so make sure you don't give flippant advice or you will only kick yourself when they end up blaming you for their downfall. Your own dreams are given flight this week. All you have to do is believe you can do what's ahead and miracles can and will occur. Ring now to better understand recent romantic events.

0906 585 4370

PISCES

Feb 19-Mar 20

Although you have more on your plate than you want at the moment, I know you can and will exceed your expectations. With the power of Saturn behind you, you'll find you have the ability to change more than you expect. Feelings come to the fore and you realise what it is you want from relationships. By Friday, you're ready to ask for it too! Ring now for a love revelation.

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In brief

- IF YOU'RE a middle-aged, female software engineer with a red Honda, you might just be one of the best drivers in the UK. That's according to Admiral Car Insurance. Staff analysed readouts from thousands of its LittleBox telematics systems fitted to UK cars. They measure smoothness of acceleration, braking and steering and adherence to the speed limit, giving a percentage score. Combining the best results from all categories created the ideal driver, in the shape of that software engineer. Women scored 58 per cent on average, beating men's 53 per cent. Liverpudlians rate an average 61 per cent to top the charts for cities. The UK's worst driver profile was a man, in his early 20s, driving a white Audi. He is childless and works as a project manager.
- NEW fuel efficiency tests reflecting real-world conditions have revealed the UK's most economical small car is the Suzuki Celerio 1.0 Dualjet. In the True MPG Awards it did 62.9mpg; beating the second-placed Toyota Yaris 1.5 VVT-i Hybrid by more than 5mpg. Third was the Volkswagen Polo 1.0 TSI 95 Bluemotion, at 56.5mpg.

Get in gear for a super experience

Auto facts

Model: Mazda2 1.5 115PS Sport Nav
Price: £15,995
Insurance group: 19E
Fuel consumption (Combined): 56.5mpg
Top speed: 124mph
Length: 406cm/160in
Width: 169.5cm/66.7in
Luggage capacity: 9.9 cu ft
Fuel tank capacity: 9.7 gallons/44 litres
CO2 emissions: 117g/km
Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles

David Duffy
david.duffy@nqo.com

IT IS quite an achievement to really put the super into supermini, but Mazda has made it look easy with the new Mazda2.

In a category packed with top-class rivals, the Mazda2 effortlessly combines muscular looks with a stylish cabin and a surprising air of sophistication.

Above all, this is a car that's superbly engaging to drive.

Competitively priced, in a 15-strong, five trim, line-up that starts at about £12,000, it scores by consistently exceeding all expectations for a small hatch-back.

Granted, the test model came in the top-specification Sport Nav trim, but it bristles with equipment normally associated with larger, more expensive cars.

Mazda2 scores its highest points with its ride, handling and refinement. Hidden beneath the smart bodywork is a lightweight ultra-stiff chassis, which lies at the heart of its agility, improved economy and ride comfort.

The all-electric power-assisted steering system is lighter and faster and constantly adjusts the level of assistance and feedback according to road conditions and vehicle speed.

Braking too is more powerful and responsive and backed up



The Mazda2 has many features usually associated with bigger models

by a variety of electronic systems. One of the cleverest is city brake support, a laser-based system that operates at speeds up to about 20mph, helping to avoid low-speed collisions.

In addition, hill hold assist controls brake pressure to help prevent the car from rolling back during hill starts.

Standard equipment levels for the Mazda2 include air-conditioning, remote central locking, an engine stop-start button, stop/start system, gear-shift indicator, and a four-speaker audio system with USB and AUX connectivity. Safety systems, including traction control and tyre pressure monitoring, are also standard.

Move up the range and keyless entry and climate control air-

conditioning are fitted, with top-of-the-range Sport Nav specification delivering everything from seven-inch touchscreen satellite navigation to a link with iPhone and Android smartphones. Bolt on the safety pack and you are treated to automatic high beam, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert and a head-up display that projects warnings and driving information, including turn-by-turn directions, directly into your field of view.

The latest version of Mazda's best-selling UK model proved an instant hit with the motoring press across the country, picking up the top supermini award from the Scottish motoring writers, and the diesel model voted best supermini in the 22nd annual Green Apple Awards.

Size matters when it comes to space

TOWNS and roads in the UK are becoming more clogged with traffic every year, despite measures to reduce congestion, such as more cycle lanes and improved public transport.

If we cannot reduce the number of cars, should we look to reduce the size of them instead?

In Japan, there is a section of vehicles called Kei cars. They are compact cars that cannot be longer than 3.4m or wider than 1.48m. They can only be fitted with an engine of up to 660cc to encourage low emissions and high economy.

An example of a Kei car made in Europe is the Smart Fortwo, which

shows the sort of fun car that can be built within tight regulations.

While a Kei might not be the ideal solution for the UK's clogged-up roads, it does pose an interesting alternative to trying to regulate traffic.

All cars pay Vehicle Excise Duty based on their carbon dioxide emissions. This has prompted most buyers to opt for a car with lower emissions.

Using this type of road tax to penalise those who choose cars with high CO2 outputs and reward those who drive a low emissions car, it is surely possible to come up with a system that also prompts drivers to choose a smaller car.

A smaller car is likely to be cheaper to buy and cost less to run. If legislation makes it attractive for drivers to choose them, manufacturers will follow with cars to suit this market.

As smaller cars occupy less road space, you can fit more into the same amount of space. This means shorter traffic queues, more easily available parking and, perhaps, even cheaper parking.

While some drivers will always need a larger car, incentivising most drivers to choose a smaller car could help unclog our towns and cities. It's better that drivers have a say in this rather it being forced upon us.

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2006 56	FORD FOCUS 1.8 Ghia. 5 door, silver, local car, aircon, alloys, PAS, Heated front windscreen, radio/cd, electric windows and door mirrors, remote central locking, etc. Sold with a new MOT, a full service, and a new cambelt kit, HPI clear.....	£2,995.00
2005 55	VAUXHALL ASTRA 1.6 LIFE TWINPORT. Metallic Dark Grey. 5 Door. Local car. Lovely condition. Good service record. PAS. Remote central locking. Radio/CD. Electric windows and mirrors. Air-conditioning. Sold with a new MOT, a full service, and a new cambelt kit, HPI clear.....	£2,650.00
005 54	TOYOTA COROLLA T3 VVTi. Red, 5 doors. Local car previously supplied by ourselves. PAS, Aircon. Alloys. Electric windows and mirrors. Remote central locking. Excellent service history. Lovely throughout. Car was fully serviced by ourselves less than 1000 miles ago. Sold with a new MOT, HPI Clear.....	£2,550.00
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2005 54	ALFA ROMEO 156 JTS Veloce 2.0. Silver Metallic. Black leather interior. Very nice condition throughout. Local car. Alloys. Air on. PAS. Radio/CD. Remote central locking. Electric windows Etc. Sold with a new MOT a full service and a new cambelt kit, HPI clear.....	£2195.00
2002 51	FORD MONDEO ZETEC 2.0 TDCi. 5 door hatchback, metallic blue, local car in very nice condition throughout, PAS, alloys, aircon, remote central locking, electric windows and doors and mirrors, radio/red, very nice example of this popular large diesel car. Sold with a new MOT, a full service, and a new cambelt kit, HPI clear.....	£1,995.00
2005 05	VAUXHALL CORSA 1.0 LIFE. silver, 3 door, local car, very low recorded miles of approximately 43400, ideal first car, or run around, Lovely condition, Sold with a new MOT, a full service, and a new cambelt kit, HPI clear.....	£1,795.00
2001 51	NISSAN MICRA 1.0 VIBE. Metallic blue. 3 door. Sold with a new MOT.....	£695.00
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2004 04	PEUGEOT 206CC COUPE. CABRIOLET. 1600cc Petrol. Black.....	Arriving Soon
2003 03	FORD FUSION 2 TDCi. 1.4cc DIESEL. Black. 5 door. One local family owner since one year old. Current road tax £30.00 for twelve months. PAS. Electric windows. Radio/CD. Very tidy car throughout. Sold with a new MOT a full service and a new cambelt kit. HPI clear.....	Available weekend

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